

A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO OUTCOME ASSESSMENT IN MARKETING EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Assessment has become a topic of growing importance for marketing educators. Recent conceptual work has provided a foundation for the development of assessment approaches and has called for implementation and evaluation of the many assessment alternatives. To facilitate the evolution of assessment in marketing education this paper provides (a) a review of factors contributing to the importance of assessment, (b) a conceptual model based on current literature, (c) the results of the model's implementation, and (d) implications from the results of the assessment.

INTRODUCTION

Assessment has received substantial attention from marketing educators in recent years. In fact, the topic has become one of the key challenges facing the marketing discipline (Welberg 1999). Authors have reviewed the current state of assessment, discussed possible performance standards, proposed alternative conceptual models, and encouraged implementation efforts. The next phase in the evolution of assessment in marketing education will be the accumulation of information regarding the implementation of the steps of assessment processes. These steps include the specification of educational objectives, identification of assessment alternatives, matching of objectives with alternatives, and implementation of the program (Hartley, Cross and Rudelius 2000).

The purpose of this paper is to report on the design and implementation of an assessment model. Factors which contribute to the importance of assessment in marketing education are reviewed. In addition, the paper describes the design of an assessment model which integrates current literature and institution-specific elements. The results of the initial test of the assessment model are reported and discussed. Finally, implications of the results are presented to facilitate future assessment program implementation efforts.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ASSESSMENT

The growing importance of assessment is related to several factors including the "integration" of the business and marketing curricula, AACSB guidelines and standards, and new educational technologies. These are discussed briefly below.

Curricula Integration

As business schools attempt to develop programs and courses that reflect contemporary practices of organizations, there has been a general shift toward integrated approaches to business education. Many of the changes reflect a shift from a "functional perspective which focused educational efforts on majors such as marketing, management, finance or accounting" (Hill 1997) to integrated courses which cover content from several functional areas. These curriculum changes create the need for improvements in traditional assessment procedures.

AACSB Guidelines and Standards

The importance of assessment has also increased as legislative and political attention to the issue has grown. The topic is not completely new, however, as it has been emphasized by the International Association for Management Education (AACSB) for over a decade:

Performance assessment, when based on clearly defined missions and objectives, provide important information that aids decision making in individual schools. Such information helps schools improve their quality, distinctiveness and competitiveness. Indeed, viewed in this fashion, outcome measurement and assessment naturally demonstrate concepts emphasized in modern business education—organizations should plan systematically to assess their performance and should adjust behavior in light of the results. In this sense, business school efforts should parallel those of business institutions by regularly

reassessing their effectiveness in a highly competitive world (AACSB 1989).

More recently, researchers have begun to evaluate the impact of AACSB standards on assessment efforts. Marks, Beckman and Lacey (2000), for example, report on the use of four types of assessment—measurement of individual learning, measurements of professional competence, course evaluations, and evaluation of progress toward instructional missions.

New Educational Technologies

The growing availability and use of new educational technologies has raised many questions regarding "the usefulness of technology in achieving student learning in marketing (Karns 1999)." While early uses of technology in the classroom were focused on using technology as a support function (Celsi 2000), today's applications include the use of technology as a pedagogical tool, as curriculum content, and as a distance learning mechanism. New forms of assessment, of course, must recognize the increasing influence of educational technologies.

AN ASSESSMENT MODEL

Assessment alternatives differ in terms of the attributes they measure and the methods they utilize to obtain the assessment information. Attributes can include knowledge dimensions related to functional areas such as marketing, skills such as verbal communication, computer, or interpersonal skills, and personal characteristics such as leadership and integrity. The variety of methods available to collect information include surveys, personal interviews, focus groups, and panels. The methods differ in terms of dimensions such as reliability, validity, cost, and ease of administration. An assessment process must balance the combinations of attributes and methods to achieve the objectives of the process.

The overall objective of the model designed for this study was to facilitate improvement in student learning. While the focus of this effort was to move from conceptual designs available in assessment literature to a working application, the model was also designed to allow an incremental implementation. The model, depicted in Figure 1, is based on three process elements – input, assessment activities, and output. The inputs include student-related data (such as placement test scores, and entrance exam results), and unit goals and objectives. Inputs also include college practices such as degree programs, curricula, teaching

approaches, advising, faculty, and the physical environment. Assessment activities include student assessment activities (e.g. student satisfaction surveys), and faculty assessment activities (e.g. performance evaluations). The output includes the results of the assessments and provides the basis for adjustments to the model. Subsequent applications may focus on departmental (e.g. marketing) assessment.

Implementation

The initial implementation of the model focused on the student assessment element. A survey of student satisfaction was designed for graduating seniors (marketing and other disciplines). During the graduation application process, students must have their application reviewed by the college advising center. This is an audit to verify that the students have the appropriate credits to fulfill degree requirements. At this point, the students were asked to complete the satisfaction survey. During the 1999-2000 academic year, roughly half of all graduates of the College of Business in a large western university were asked to complete the survey. A total of 398 surveys were completed.

Likert scale questions (5 points) were used to measure the level of agreement with a variety of questions pertaining to student satisfaction. The questions addressed two levels of satisfaction. First, students responded to general questions regarding their overall satisfaction. Second, many questions were aimed at department level issues, since students have more interactions with departments than the college as a whole. Demographic and classification data were also collected. Basic descriptive statistics were derived from the analysis and they are presented below.

RESULTS

The mean score (as shown in Table 1) for overall satisfaction was 2.1 (1=very high), a score indicating a relatively good level of satisfaction. The data also show high levels of satisfaction with student activities (2.6) and social activities (2.7). The respondents also reported satisfaction with the advising office (see Table 2). A variety of data was also collected on the experiences in each major (see Table 2). The major department as a whole (2.13) and teaching ability of the faculty in the major (2.03) were viewed positively. The respondents also reported satisfaction with course grading and opportunities for evaluation of faculty.

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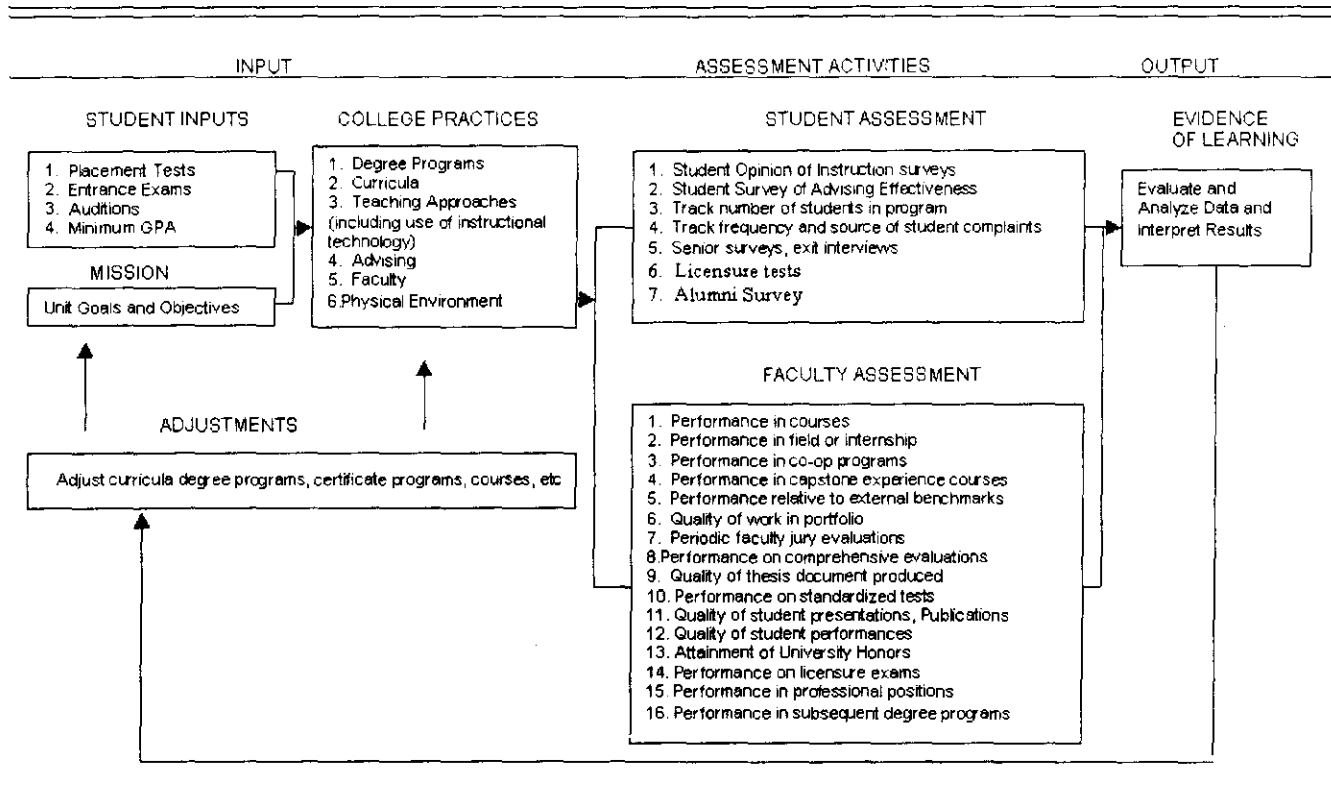
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FIGURE 1
A COLLEGE-SPECIFIC ASSESSMENT MODEL



CONCLUSIONS

The first phase of the implementation of this assessment model provided several general and several specific conclusions. From a general perspective the development of the conceptual model provided a focus for all college assessment activities. The model attempts to represent the potential assessment activities of the entire college. In addition, because of the large number and variety of assessment activities identified, the need for incremental implementation became immediately apparent. Other surveys related to alumni and employers are planned for use in the future. Finally, the results of the survey reported above have provided useful feedback for making adjustment to the assessment process, particularly with regard to college practices.

Specific conclusions are also possible. For example, in this application of an element of an assessment model, College of Business students

were generally satisfied with their experience. In addition, it appears that if there are problems with student satisfaction they are closely related to department issues. Possible strategies could include more involvement with career planning and improved faculty/student interactions. Grading fairness is also an important issue. Finally, a rigorous survey process and a student census is a possibility since every student has to be processed by the advising center.

This study reported on the implementation of one element of a comprehensive assessment model. Combining additional survey results from other assessment tools will yield the type of comprehensive assessment that AACSB recommends. In addition, the study provides an example of the transition from conceptual efforts to implementation likely in the marketing discipline in the future.

TABLE 1

Overall Measures of Satisfaction

Attribute	Mean*	Standard Deviation	N
Satisfaction with academic experiences	2.10	.64	391
Satisfaction with student activities	2.63	.83	377
Satisfaction with social activities	2.71	.85	378

*1 = very high, 5 = very low

TABLE 2

Specific Measures of Satisfaction

Attribute	Mean*	Std. Deviation	N
I am satisfied with academic advising in my college.	2.18	.96	382
I am satisfied with my department.	2.13	.88	383
I am satisfied with the teaching ability of faculty in my department.	2.03	.80	386
I am satisfied with the professional expertise of departmental faculty.	2.01	.72	385
I am satisfied with opportunities for evaluation of classroom instruction in department.	2.17	.84	382
I am satisfied with the fairness of grading in departmental classes.	2.14	.81	383
I am satisfied with the opportunities for interaction with departmental faculty.	2.23	.90	384

I am satisfied that the courses in my department prepare me for employment.	2.40	.98	383
I am satisfied that the courses in my department prepared me for graduate or professional school.	2.70	1.12	384
I am satisfied with information provided about internships, practicums, or co-op experiences.	3.02	1.22	383
I am satisfied with opportunities to participate in internships or practicums.	2.90	1.24	386
I am satisfied with computer training for my career. my	2.91	1.28	385
I am satisfied with departmental assistance in planning my career.	3.20	1.15	382
I am satisfied with departmental assistance in obtaining a job.	3.36	1.24	383
I am satisfied with Career Placement assistance in learning about job opportunities.	3.10	1.27	382
I am satisfied with the availability of required courses in my major.	2.88	1.30	385
I am satisfied with the academic ability of other students in my major.	2.33	.90	251
Satisfaction with Career assistance and internships.	2.95	.8236	373
Satisfaction with Academic Department	2.11	.5881	375

*1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree

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