

**THE WRETCHED REFUSE OF A TEEMING SHORE:
A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE QUALITY OF MARKETING STUDENTS**

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ABSTRACT

In this study, we examine the quality of marketing majors at the two ends of their undergraduate college program: as they enter college and as they appear for graduate education admission tests. Using a national data base representing students enrolled in five business disciplines (finance, MIS, marketing, management, and accounting), we analyzed the differences across majors on a number of variables used to predict academic preparation. These measures included indicators such as ACT and SAT scores, performance in high school math, science and English courses as well as GPA and a comprehensive merit index that incorporates a number of variables including the rigor of high school courses undertaken by the student. On the other end, we compared marketing majors' performance on the GMAT test to that of other majors.

As educators, most of us have made comparisons among class sections over the years. Often these comparisons unfavorably compare students from the "good old days" with current students that seem to have weaker academic preparation. We also make comparisons within classes, often focused on differences among students across majors. Anecdotally, we believe that many marketing faculty ask the question, "Why is it that the accounting students seem to do so well in my principles of marketing course compared to those with a marketing major?"

The problem of academic preparation among marketing majors is, however, more than anecdotal. The literature on academic preparation for and performance in college by marketing students compared to students in other business and non-business disciplines suggests that not only are business students (and particularly marketing students) among the most poorly prepared, but there has also been a decline in the quality of students choosing to study marketing.

The results of our analysis of a national, representative sample of marketing students are sobering. Compared to other business majors, it appears that marketing is attracting among the lowest quality students on a variety of different measures. On the output side, based on an international sample, marketing majors score among the lowest of all majors on the GMAT. Thus, marketing seems to attract students with a lower level of academic preparation and our students continue to perform at a lower level (in terms of their performance on GMAT) after they graduate. Implications and possible steps to address this discouraging problem are offered including repositioning marketing as a discipline and activities attempting to attract stronger, better prepared students.