

CAN GOOD CHOICES BE BAD? MEASUREMENT OF THE EFFECT OF LEVEL OF CHOICE AND INTEREST OF COURSE SELECTION ON PERCEIVED QUALITY OF A BUSINESS OPTION

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ABSTRACT

How much choice should students have within their marketing majors or curriculum? Course choice is a topic generating considerable attention in business education (Kushner 1999). The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), no longer mandates a proscribed model curriculum. This has contributed to increased curriculum flexibility (Blum 1991).

Course choice can affect the actual quality of career preparation. Inadequate guidance in choice of courses can leave students unprepared for a desired career path (Shuptrine and Willenborg 1998). Perhaps the average undergraduate student does not have the experience needed to make informed choices. On the other hand, a "one size fits all" curriculum that is too restricted may be inadequate to address the differing needs of students.

Course choice may also affect how students feel about themselves. Choice is viewed as empowering. Lack of choice leads to a perceived threat to freedom, lowers motivation, and decreases feelings of control (Deci and Ryan 1985). Too little freedom of choice in education may lead students to react in a negative way toward their education, thereby lowering satisfaction and motivation. However, too much choice can be demotivating, a source of stress and discomfort, and lead to deferred decisions (Iyengar and Lepper 2000).

Finally, the degree of choice may affect how students perceive the quality of an academic program. A program allowing too much choice may be perceived as lacking quality control (Mansfield 2003), but too little choice may be attributed to a lack of resources necessary for a quality education.

The results of our study suggest that some degree of curriculum choice is good, but if students must make too many choices they may feel less satisfied with

the results. Perhaps they want some choice, but do not feel sure of themselves and thus prefer to rely on expert opinion for a portion of decisions about their curriculum. Results also found that choice had a positive impact on the perceived value of the chosen business option for students' future careers, but that the level of interest influenced the value students perceived for employers. Perhaps choice allows students to feel enabled to maximize perceived value for their own careers, but interest enhances perceptions of value to others.

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