

TEACHING GRADUATING SENIORS HOW TO MARKET THEMSELVES

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As the conference theme implies, marketing involves special challenges - and may require distinctive approaches - in an era of economic and political instability. This statement applies to the marketing of not only traditional offerings such as goods and services but also nontraditional offerings such as jobseekers. An uncertain or depressed economic environment may reduce the number of available entry-level jobs in relation to the number of new college graduates seeking those positions.

To teach graduating seniors how to better market themselves, a series of six 90-minute job hunting seminars has been offered on a no-fee, noncredit basis at Arizona State University (ASU) for the past six years. Several key aspects of the seminar series are summarized below:

Objectives. The seminar series was designed to serve a primary target market of seniors in the College of Business Administration (CBA). Given the primary target market, the following objectives were established for the seminar series: To introduce students who are not already familiar with the campus placement service to this valuable source of information, interview opportunities, and other job-hunting support; to increase students' appreciation of how important and time-consuming the job search is; and to provide students with useful job-hunting skills.

Format. After considering alternative ways to cover job-hunting information and skills, the format decided upon was a six-seminar series presented over six weeks. This alternative was chosen for two main reasons. First, a noncredit, no-fee arrangement would be most conducive to purely voluntary attendance. In other words, it was decided to "sell" the program on its own merits - namely, the potential short-term benefits to participants - rather than as a way to earn one or more credits. Second, from a practical standpoint, a semi-formal program would be easier to implement than a formal course would be.

Topics and Speakers. The sequence of topic coverage coincides with the order in which the job seeker will encounter the various tasks. The topics covered, by seminar, are summarized below:

Seminar #1: A Job Hunting Sequence; How to Use Career Services; Job Market Outlook.

Seminar #2: Preparation of Resumé and Cover Letter.

Seminar #3: Reflections on Job Hunting Experiences.

Seminar #4: Interviewing Guidelines and Procedures.

Seminar #5: Simulated Interviews; The Invited Trip to the Organization's Facilities.

Seminar #6: Criteria for Evaluating Job Offers; The Importance of Personal Finances and Motivation.

To maximize interest levels at each seminar as well as credibility of the messages being communicated, speakers include placement service staff members, corporate recruiters, recent CBA graduates, and faculty members.

Evaluation. Average attendance at each seminar typically has been in the range of 180-200 students. According to statistics from 1980, 75% of the attendees were undergraduates in the CBA, another 20% were graduate students in the CBA, and the remaining students came from other colleges on campus. Thus, it appears that the seminar series is attracting its primary target market.

At the end of the seminar series, students complete an evaluation form in which they rate individual topics and speakers as well as the entire seminar series. Every topic and speaker in 1980 was rated as Outstanding or Good by at least 75% of the responding students. On the overall evaluation, the 1980 series was rated as either Outstanding or Good by all responding students; no Fair, Weak, or Poor ratings were included in the overall evaluations.

Future Directions. A change that might permit the seminar series to serve a larger market would be offering the series twice a year. To facilitate attendance by commuting and/or working students who are unable to attend late-afternoon programs, the plausibility of running each session twice a day or videotaping each session and making the tapes available for viewing at the students' convenience is being evaluated. To provide students with "hands on" experience in resumé preparation and interviewing, consideration is being given to adding two more seminars to the series.

Conclusion. Marketing educators sometimes play an important role in the input part of the educational system when they assist in student and faculty recruiting or recommend admission standards. We certainly assume central roles in the process part of the system when we engage in curriculum design as well as instruction. Although some marketing educators assist in soliciting companies to visit campus for recruiting purposes, marketing educators generally are not frequently involved in the output part of the educational system. A job hunting seminar series, as described in this paper, is one practical way in which marketing educators can seize a real opportunity (or accept the obligation) to assist students in the output part of the educational system.