

EXAMINING MARKETING RESEARCH EDUCATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MARKETING ALUMNI

Regina P. Schlee, Seattle Pacific University
School of Business and Economics, Seattle, WA 98119, (206) 281-3638

ABSTRACT

This study examines marketing graduates' evaluations of various skills commonly taught in undergraduate marketing research courses. Previous studies have identified gaps in the expectations of skills taught in marketing research classes among marketing research educators, marketing research practitioners, and graduate students. However, no articles have examined marketing research education from the perspective of students after they have graduated.

This study is based on a random sample of 20 marketing graduates from a private religiously affiliated university. These alumni represent a broad spectrum of industries and job categories. But, because the sample size of this study is very small, this is an exploratory study which is meant to point the direction for future research.

The research findings indicate that the majority of marketing graduates use many of the skills they learned in marketing research courses. Some of the skills they learned such as statistical analyses, conceptualizing marketing research problems, and being able to analyze and interpret marketing data proved to be very important in their jobs. Some of the respondents wished they had "applied" themselves more, so they had learned more in college. A few indicated they would have preferred if faculty had been harder on them and "made them learn." Others focused on the need for computer skills and wished the university

gave them a greater opportunity to learn more software packages.

While this research was exploratory, it points to the need for more research in the area. Given the small sample size used, the job needs of recent vs. older graduates were not fully explored. Similarly, future research needs to focus on the needs of graduates in various occupations, i.e. marketing management, sales, and marketing research. Such research also needs to include marketing alumni from different types of universities; public and private, large and small.

More importantly, this research points to the need to reexamine what we teach in the classroom and how we evaluate our faculty's teaching abilities. Student evaluations obtained at the end of the quarter or semester, do not necessarily reflect the amount of knowledge gained in courses. Furthermore, undergraduate students are not the best judges of how well the knowledge they gained will help them perform in the workplace. As some of the graduates interviewed in this study noted, professors do not want to deal with "grunt work" in class because it is not "fun." Instead, courses tend to focus on strategic and conceptual issues that are significantly more interesting to students. The question that needs to be continuously asked is "what type of education will serve the students' long term interests best?"