

## HOW AN MBA EXIT SURVEY IS CHANGING A MARKETING CURRICULUM

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### ABSTRACT

An exit survey of Business Policy students revealed low satisfaction with their attainment of two goals and five objectives that respondents rated as being important to them. Similarly, they reported low satisfaction with five teacher behaviors that they considered important. Opinions regarding the value of core courses also raised concern. Several strategies are described for solving these problems, including: much greater emphasis on writing skills, establishing a firm connection between Marketing concepts and managers' need to apply them personally for job searches and career advancement and introduction of new courses in "Current Issues in Marketing" and "Marketing of the Individual." Tactics are described for developing students' interpersonal skills within the context of learning Marketing.

### INTRODUCTION

According to Hoffman and Dunnington (1987) and Kayla and others (1981), exit surveys are used in many colleges and universities for evaluation of courses, sequences of courses, placement information, evaluation of instructor effectiveness, verifying completion of graduation requirements, program review, and self-study/accreditation. Our initial purpose at General (fictitious name for a real school) University Graduate School of Business was more marketing-oriented.

A University-wide budget tightening had led to elimination of funds for promoting our MBA program. Therefore, we felt a need to find out what the "word of mouth" was regarding our program, since this was the principal promotional tool remaining to us. As our exit study started producing information, our purpose in doing the survey broadened substantially.

### THE EXIT SURVEY

#### The Pilot Study

The survey sampling frame consisted of all the students enrolled in the capstone Business Policy course. It was deemed that this group of students would have accumulated the most experience with our program and would be in the best position to provide useful information. Accordingly, during the Spring 1988 semester, a sub sample of one class was selected and a ten open-ended question form was administered to discover areas important to our students and to get some idea of what their opinions were regarding these issues. The objective was to generate hypotheses to be tested in a structured quantitative survey. This approach was effective in generating over twenty hypotheses worthy of further testing. A full description would be beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice

it to say that our hypotheses included:

- H1: Students' principal goals were to become more marketable and to increase their competence in their field.
- H2: In pursuing their goals, students wanted to attain the following objectives: writing skills, presentation skills, negotiating skills, ability to influence others and career development skills.
- H3: The core curriculum was viewed by many students as a burden, not generating sufficient benefit in exchange for its cost in time, effort and money.
- H4: The quality of instruction that students were receiving in their major fields was wanting, in that teachers were not using up-to-date materials, were not relating theories to current issues and were not emphasizing key points sufficiently.

At this point, the objective of the study shifted from discovering what word-of-mouth promotion we were receiving toward securing information that would enable us to improve our MBA program.

A five-page questionnaire was developed and administered to 104 students to test the questions and refine the issues further through additional open-ended questions. Findings of this study supported almost all of the hypotheses, and prepared the way for the quantitative study that would form a base for decision-making.

#### The Quantitative Study

The sampling frame for the quantitative study was all the students enrolled in Business Policy during the Summer 1988 semester, a total of 293 students. Questionnaires were administered in class by research assistants, with permission of the instructors. A total of 209 usable questionnaires were returned for a 71% response rate. Limiting ourselves to the scope of this paper, the following findings may be reported, with respect to the entire group of 209 respondents. Answers of the 13 Marketing majors did not differ significantly.

Regarding the first hypothesis (goals), it was found that on an eleven point zero to ten importance scale, "To make yourself more marketable," and "To increase your competence in your field," received the highest ratings, 8.9 and 8.8, respectively. The question was "How important is each of the following goals to you?" The anchors were 0 = "Not at all important" and 10 = "Extremely important." Furthermore, on a similar 0 to 10 satisfaction scale, the same two goals received ratings of 7.0 and 6.3, respectively. The question was "How satisfied are you with the GU-GSB in helping you to achieve each of the following

provided to help them to prepare and rehearse the presentations.

3. During class discussions, as opportunities present themselves, questions are raised about the applicability of the concepts being discussed to the marketing efforts of MBA's in seeking jobs and/or advancement.

Students occasionally express dismay about the amount of work. The reassuring response of the instructor is that surveys have disclosed, beyond reasonable doubt, that the corporate world wants MBA's to have excellent communications skills, in addition to understanding Marketing. In addition, they are told that graduating students have confirmed the need for these skills, so that it is clearly in the students best interests to do the work required and to do excellently. Many other encouragements are offered and the relationship between excellent performance in meeting the requirements of this course and future success is explained in a variety of ways.

Privately, the instructor confesses that he is amazed at the amount of work that may be heaped on a class and still not have them revolt.

#### The Curriculum in the Marketing Major

Within the curriculum for the Marketing Major, two new courses are in development to help deal with the dissatisfactions expressed by students.

"Current Issues in Marketing." This will be a seminar course focusing on the current Marketing literature. Each student will be required to write and present three papers on current issues. To get things rolling, the instructor will give the initial presentations, while students are beginning to research and write their reports. The instructor will also provide a non-limiting list of possible subject areas.

"Marketing of the Individual." This will be an elective for Marketing majors. The course will cover the marketing of politicians, executives, administrators, entertainment stars and especially MBA students and professional and managerial corporate employees. Students will be required to prepare and present a research-based marketing plan for an individual. Guest speakers from industry will help to increase the sense of realism of the course and may also help students to develop job leads.

In addition to planning new courses, existing courses are being reformed without sacrificing content coverage. There is more emphasis on writing and presenting by students. Special exercises are being introduced to sharpen students' communications and interpersonal skills. Two examples are described below.

Developing Students' Questioning Skills. On the premise that managers need to know how to dig out information through questioning, several case study discussions are developed through the "Question & Answer" technique. The instructor comes to class with a case study the students have never seen. It is the job of the class to ask suffi-

cient questions of enough depth to elicit from the instructor enough information to enable the class to analyze the case. Following the Q & A session, which lasts about an hour, students write their analyses in class and hand them in for grading.

"Q&A" Combined with Interpersonal Skills. The session starts in the same way as above. Following the question period, which is cut by about 15 minutes, students meet in small groups and hammer out a solution of the case. They write it up immediately and hand it in for grading. Possibly, they will also rate each other's contributions to the analysis and hand that in too.

Clearly, much remains to be done to respond to all of the needs defined in the survey. As additional strategies are developed and implemented, surveys will be taken to determine whether desirable results are being achieved and to see if any new problems crop up.

#### CONCLUSION

In these times of rapid change, no one can assume that any curriculum or course is achieving its objectives as effectively as it did at the time it was instituted. It is only through carefully conducted and precisely aimed surveys of the client populations, students and their employers that we can determine whether we are still doing our job as well as we could.

Course and instructor evaluations by themselves are not sufficient. First, they are taken when the course is still fresh in students' minds. Second, they tend to focus on instructor performance. Ultimately, what counts is: "What did the students learn?" "How durable was the learning?" and "How do students perceive the value of what they retained?"

We have surveyed exiting students because they are the ones who have experienced the entire process and are in the best position (except for alumni) to report the perceived usefulness of what they learned under our tutelage and the amount of satisfaction they feel at the end. Continuing surveys will enable us to monitor the effectiveness of the changes we are making and may also discover new problems.

#### REFERENCES

- Hoffman, Janet and David Dunnington (1987), "The Use of Exit Surveys at the University of Washington," Center for Instructional Development and Research, Washington University, Seattle. Cited in the ERIC database, #289432.
- Keyla, Carol and others (1981), "Student Evaluation of Graduate Programs in Selected Southern Universities," Office of Institutional Research, West Virginia University, Morgantown. Cited in the ERIC database, #211021.

Exhibit 1: "How Important" and "How Satisfied"

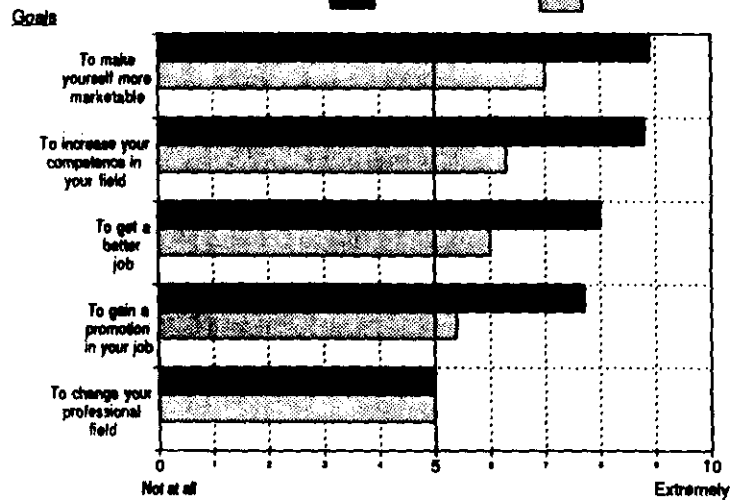


Exhibit 2: "How Important" and "How Satisfied"

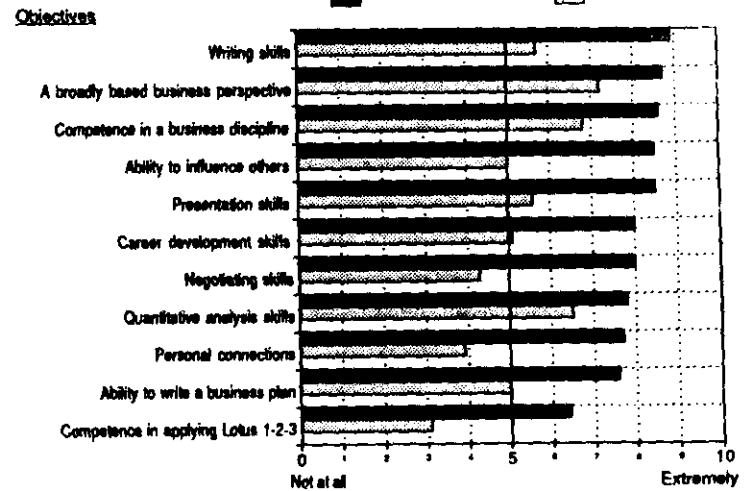


Exhibit 3: Benefits vs. Costs

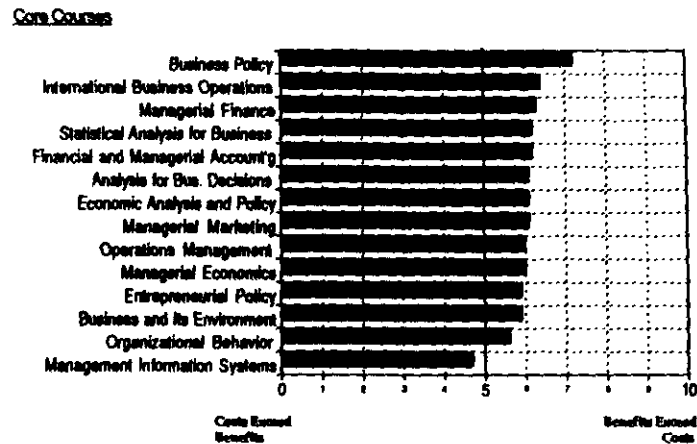


Exhibit 4: "How Important" and "How Satisfied"

