

MARKETING STUDENTS' EVALUATION OF THEIR SCHOOL AND MAJOR: A MULTICAMPUS STUDY

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ABSTRACT

A telephone survey of undergraduate transfer business students was conducted at five campuses of a major public university system to assess their attitudes toward their major and evaluate their academic experience. Several measures were used to gather data on these students' attitudes toward their business school and their university. Differences between marketing and other business majors on these measures are presented together with the reasons they chose their majors.

INTRODUCTION

There are many articles in the business education literature on the subject of student evaluation of their college programs. The thrust of some of these is to view the university as offering a product to students as consumers who are more or less satisfied with their education. For example, Conant, Brown and Mokwa (1985) used the disconfirmation perspective (the difference between prior expectations and perceived performance) of consumer satisfaction as a framework for exploring satisfaction among MBA students. They reported disconfirmation and expectations each directly influence satisfaction, although disconfirmation has more of an impact on student satisfaction than expectations. Schmidt, Debevec, and Comm (1987) also used the student as a consumer perspective when they investigated the difference between business majors' attitudes towards their college experience. Their results suggest that business departments can increase student satisfaction through the strategic planning process. Students who select different majors represent somewhat different segments of the student population, with each seeking different sets of attributes from their business education. Similarly, Hampton (1983) investigated the importance to students of the

quality, recognition, compensation, working conditions, and social life of their education. He found students perceive different majors offered by a university as different products, with each satisfying a different set of needs. Hawes and Glisan (1983) studied the offerings of a marketing department via the marketing concept. They found undergraduate and graduate students differed in the set of attributes that they wanted from the marketing department.

These evaluative studies provide useful background for the current study of business school transfer students. Specifically, their expectations and academic experiences were investigated. This study also investigated the reasons that transfer students give for choosing a major. There is virtually nothing in the business education literature on this subject.

METHODOLOGY

Nearly 1200 telephone interviews were conducted with students from the business schools at five campuses of a major public university system, the California State University (CSU), during the spring of 1990. The CSU system has over three hundred thousand students enrolled at its twenty campuses. Approximately fifty percent of these students have transferred from community colleges. Despite their previous college experience, less than fifty percent ever earn a bachelor's degree.

At each campus students in marketing research classes used a common survey instrument to collect data from the target population. A list of transfer students and their telephone numbers were obtained from the university registrars at each campus and telephone interviews were conducted with these students, who had just ended their first quarter or semester at each campus.

RESULTS

The data derived from this survey is reported in several sections. The first section describes the demographic characteristics of the transfer students. The second section reports the reasons why they decided on their academic major and then details the respondents' attitudes about their business school experience.

For most variables, the data are broken down by various business majors. These majors are marketing, accounting, finance, information and decisions sciences (IDS), management, and other (e.g., human resources management, etc.). Differences between marketing and other business majors are discussed when appropriate.

Profile of Sample

Transfer students represent a unique segment of business school students. As shown in Table 1, the typical transfer student in this study had an average age of 25 years. This may mean that they are more mature than the "traditional" student. They work an average of 27.4 hours per week and 21.6% are currently married. Fewer of these students participate in the typical campus life and activities of their traditional counterparts: less than three percent live on campus and only 12.3% had joined a student organization in the business school in their first quarter or semester at the university.

Marketing students tend to be somewhat younger, are much less likely to be married and tend to spend less time studying than their contemporaries who have declared other majors. Conversely, accounting majors were somewhat older, almost 30% are married, and spend more time studying per week.

Choice of Major

All transfer students in the current study were asked in an open-ended question to indicate the reason(s) for choosing his/her major. These results are shown in Table 2. Among all students, the most frequent response was that their major had good job opportunities. Marketing majors also rated job opportunities highly, but it was in second place rather than first. Marketing majors were more likely than any others to say that their interest in the topic was the reason they selected their major. For all students, interest in the topic was the second most frequent reason given for choosing their major. The recommendation of family or friends tended to be the least cited reason for choosing a major.

Business School Expectations and Experience

A major objective of this study was to evaluate the experience that transfer students have in their first year in the business school. If the experience is satisfactory, students would be less likely to drop out. Other research has shown that transfers in general drop out for a variety of reasons including

TABLE 1
PROFILE OF TRANSFER BUSINESS STUDENTS

Characteristic	Results Overall	Accounting	Finance	Management	Marketing	IDS	Other	p
Average Credit Units Taken in First Term	11.8	11.6	11.6	11.2	12.2	11.7	12.3	0.06**
Average Number of Hours Study Per Week	14.6	16.7	15.2	12.2	12.1	14.3	15.3	0.00**
Lives on Campus (%)	2.3%	1.4%	1.2%	3.4%	3.6%	2.6%	2.2%	0.08*
Married (%)	21.6%	29.9%	18.8%	22.8%	9.7%	34.2%	17.1%	0.00*
Currently Employed (%)	74.0%	76.8%	75.9%	76.7%	70.9%	78.5%	68.7%	0.16*
Average Number of Hours Work Per Week if Employed	27.4	26.7	29.4	28.3	26.8	28.7	26.1	0.19*
Average Age (Years)	25.0	26.0	24.5	25.1	23.3	26.5	24.5	0.00**
Gender: Female (%)	49.7%	55.1%	39.6%	50.0%	45.8%	44.3%	53.4%	0.02*
Belongs to a Student Organization in Business (%)	12.3%	19.0%	8.5%	8.3%	12.7%	15.2%	8.9%	0.00*
Very Likely to Enroll Next Term (%)	86.6%	83.7%	87.3%	91.7%	87.4%	94.9%	83.3%	0.11*
Sample Size	1,166	294	165	180	166	79	282	

* Chi-Square Test

** ANOVA Test

the lack of financial resources, an increase in the proportion of part-time students, and changes in enrollment patterns (more older students and females) (Avalos and Saltzman 1989; Villella 1986; Lara 1980). As shown in Table 3, most students found the academic experience in their initial year to be about what they expected. The typical transfer student felt that the coursework was about as rigorous as expected, that the study time required and quality of instruction was the same as expected

prior to arrival in the business school. However, for each of these two questions there was a large minority whose expectations were not realized. Over one-fourth found the work more difficult than expected and nearly 40% find that the coursework requires more study time than expected. For each of these three variables there were no differences between marketing and other majors.

Students were also asked to what extent they

Table 2
Reasons for Choice of Major by Transfer Students
(% by Major)

Characteristic	Percent Overall	Accounting	Finance	Management	Marketing	IDS	Other
Like the Business Orientation of This Type of Major	9.0	7.5	7.8	10.6	9.1	6.3	11.4
Program Has Good Reputation at This University	2.6	3.1	2.3	2.0	1.7	1.6	3.6
Think I Have Aptitude for This Type of Work	12.1	22.1	10.2	9.9	5.8	15.9	5.4
Advancement in Present Job	4.7	3.1	2.3	9.3	3.3	4.8	5.4
Area Has Good Future Job Opportunities	22.8	19.5	25.0	24.5	19.8	25.4	25.1
Topic Seems to be of Interest to Me	24.6	25.2	22.7	17.9	37.2	23.8	22.8
Family or Friends Recommended This Major	3.2	1.3	4.7	3.3	5.0	1.6	3.6
Have Previous Experience in This Area	8.5	7.5	8.6	7.9	8.3	9.5	15.6
Other Reasons Given	9.6	7.5	8.6	7.9	8.3	9.5	15.6
Note Sure of Reason	2.9	3.1	2.3	2.0	5.8	0.0	3.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 3
Student Experience Versus Expectation When Transferring
(% By Major)

Characteristic	Percent Overall	Accounting	Finance	Management	Marketing	IDS	Other	Significance
Difficulty of Coursework in the Business School								
-- More Than Expected	26.0	30.0	19.9	27.8	21.4	22.8	27.5	18.75*
-- Same As Expected	65.5	61.1	71.1	61.9	67.3	72.2	65.9	0.23**
-- Less Than Expected	8.6	8.8	9.0	10.2	11.3	5.5	6.5	
Amount of Time Spent Studying								
-- More Than Expected	39.0	45.0	34.8	32.8	39.8	34.2	39.9	14.03*
-- Same as Expected	52.6	47.4	57.0	60.5	48.4	58.2	51.4	0.17**
-- Less Than Expected	8.4	7.6	8.2	6.8	11.8	7.6	8.7	
Quality of Instruction								
-- Better Than Expected	32.6	32.2	40.1	28.5	32.7	30.4	31.8	9.18*
-- Same as Expected	53.2	52.1	50.0	56.4	50.3	54.4	55.4	0.52**
-- Worse Than Expected	14.2	15.7	9.9	15.1	17.0	15.2	12.9	
Relevance of Coursework								
-- Very Relevant	51.2	61.1	50.6	50.0	44.0	60.5	43.9	34.07*
-- Somewhat Relevant	43.4	35.8	45.1	44.4	50.6	32.9	48.2	0.00**
-- Not Relevant	5.4	3.1	4.3	5.6	5.4	6.6	7.9	

* Chi-Square

** Significance

believe that the coursework that they were undertaking in the business school would be relevant to them after graduation. The majority of students felt that current courses were very relevant, although this rating was somewhat lower for marketing majors and higher for those in accounting and IDS.

CONCLUSIONS

This study focused attention on a segment of business education which previously has received little attention: the transfer student. Many public universities, particularly in states with extensive community college systems, are the recipient of a large percentage of upper division transfer students who are merged with their "native" student counterparts. Such is certainly the case for many business programs. Usually the transferring students enter the university having already selected an academic major, while those students starting as freshmen often have not decided whether business, let alone which area of business, will be their major.

The results of this study indicated that the transfer student is typically a mature individual who often balances a heavy class schedule with an equally heavy work schedule. Coupled with the fact that many are married, these findings suggest that college and campus activities represent only a portion of his/her commitments. In addition, a large portion of business school transfers find that the demands placed on them by courses and instructors are greater than anticipated, perhaps reflecting differences in academic philosophy of grading criteria used at the previous institution. There were very few differences between the business school majors. These results suggest that business schools could perform a useful service by better articulating the academic demands of their programs to potential transfers as a way of better preparing them for the change.

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