

## **MARKETING'S CONTRIBUTION TO GENERAL EDUCATION LEARNING OUTCOMES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The role of the Marketing discipline in providing general education learning outcomes was evaluated using a survey administered over a three-year period to 1,650 graduating students. Comparative analyses were conducted among the 160 Marketing majors, the 441 other business majors, and the remaining non-business majors. Significant differences were found in the general education learning outcomes of these groups. Marketing majors reported greater general education learning outcomes than both other business majors and non-business majors. A case can be made that the liberal arts foundations of the Marketing discipline results in better general education outcomes.

### **Introduction**

Diminishing resources and public doubts about the capacity of universities to create productive members of society has led to much closer scrutiny of academic programs (Bilder and Conrad, 1996). These forces have led to an increasing need to demonstrate that academe is fulfilling its societal responsibilities. Outcomes assessments, such as those within departmental program reviews, are seen as the means to fulfill this need. Many outcomes are not specific to the major. They reflect competencies associated with the general education core. It is difficult to differentiate between the contributions of previous education experience and those of the major. This problem is particularly acute for specialized undergraduate majors, such as Marketing, because the dividing line between the general education liberal arts core and the major is indistinct. The general education core and the major are interwoven.

Specialized professional knowledge should be, therefore, anchored with liberal arts core values. This holistic view is necessary if the graduation credential

is to reflect a quality education, as well as specific career preparation.

### **Marketing and the Liberal Arts**

The debate on the definition and scope of Marketing resulted in an expanded view of the discipline. The new accepted definition of Marketing goes beyond the study of commercial exchange and now includes social transactions, not-for-profit organizations, fundamental ethical issues, the study of diversity, systems thinking, and more (Hunt, 1991). When viewed from a course/subspecialization level the role of Marketing in delivering general education outcomes is positive. At a minimum, each course delivers at least one valued liberal arts outcome. Case-oriented Marketing courses provide skills of inquiry, International Marketing requires understanding of cultural differences, Market Ethics teaches values and choices. Not-for-Profit Marketing sensitizes students to social responsibility, Advertising reinforces communications skills, Selling does the same for interpersonal skills, Sales Force Management stresses team building, Marketing Strategy fosters a systems viewpoint, Consumer Behavior enhances a student's understanding of human behavior, and Market Research reinforces a student's quantitative and reasoning skills. The key question posed by Haworth in evaluating a professional education such as that provided by Marketing is, "What have graduates learned and how have they changed because of their enrollment in a professional program?" (1996). This question can be answered by comparing the ultimate outcomes of students enrolled in the Marketing program to all others who shared the same general education experience.

### **Establishment of the Assessment System**

A faculty group at a medium-sized independent university was assigned the task of defining specific general education outcomes. The consensus of the faculty was to assess outcomes in three ways: a survey of graduating students who reported progress on the 13 dimensions, faculty assessments of questions embedded in capstone course final exams, and content analysis of student focus groups. Three years of data have now been collected. This paper reports on the survey of graduating students.

The questions on the survey, which is administered at graduation, tap self-reported capabilities on 13 learning dimensions at two times: as the student entered the university, and as he or she graduates. Each is measured on a seven-point Likert scale. Students also assess the relative importance of the 13 learning dimensions on a five-point Likert scale. They are also asked to judge the university's contribution to their personal growth and development during their time at the university. Tests on reliability showed correlations between time at the university and contribution, and consistency among common factors. Reliability tests showed there is a strong correlation between length of time at the university and positive assessments. The 13 learning outcomes measures are listed in Table 1 below. Their origins are also indicated.

TABLE 1  
THIRTEEN LEARNING OUTCOMES

	GEC	WAG	UMS	CR
1. Respect for the diversity and richness of other cultures	✓			
2. Preparation to become a productive member of society			✓	
3. Acceptance of responsibility to the community			✓	
4. Understanding of contemporary civilization in light of history and the inter-relatedness of systems	✓			
5. Competence in the specific material within your major			✓	
6. Communication skills	✓			
7. A respect and quest for lifelong learning	✓			
8. Ability to perform as a member of a team				✓
9. Recognition of real world problems and opportunities		✓		
10. Conceptualization of order, patterns and themes in complex situations				✓
11. Ability to select and to utilize methods to solve complex problems		✓		
12. Ability to make ethical and moral decisions in a framework of personal and social responsibility	✓			
13. Quantitative and mathematical skills		✓		

GEC = General Education Core (The Five Themes)  
WAG = WASC Assessment Guidelines  
UMS = University Mission Statement  
CR = Carnegie Report

## Results

A comparison was done of the general education outcomes by degree program. The Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSBA) students reported greater value added for 12 of the 13 general education learning outcomes than all other undergraduate majors. The BSBA students reported greater value added than all other students, including graduate students, for 7 of the 13 outcomes. The details of these comparisons are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2  
COMPARISON OF OUTCOMES ENHANCEMENT (VALUE ADDED) BY BUSINESS DEGREE PROGRAM

Outcome	Undergraduate Programs					Graduate Programs				Sig	BSBA Value Added
	BSBA	BA	BS(CE)	MBA	MA	MSE	M	F			
Respect for diversity	1.67	1.46	0.97	1.62	1.83	1.04	1497	6,140	.000	University Highest	
Productive member of society	1.46	0.98	0.93	1.33	1.02	0.88	1491	6,488	.000	University Highest	
Community service	1.30	0.83	0.92	1.24	1.06	0.73	1479	9,024	.000	Undergrad. Highest	
Global systems	1.48	1.31	1.07	1.27	1.51	1.02	1453	2,787	.005	Undergrad. Highest	
Competence in specific major	2.23	2.00	1.08	2.16	2.74	1.80	1481	2,161	.029	Undergrad. Highest	
Communication skills	1.70	1.00	1.38	1.72	1.77	1.42	1486	2,518	.010	Undergrad. Highest	
Commitment to life long learning	1.52	1.34	1.14	1.53	1.42	0.93	1480	2,851	.004	Undergrad. Highest	
Team work	1.57	0.98	1.11	1.40	1.58	1.07	1480	8,864	.000	University Highest	
Problem recognition	1.56	1.38	1.18	1.56	1.53	1.02	1477	9,786	.000	University Highest	
Conceptualization of order in complex situations	1.80	1.36	1.17	1.40	1.49	1.25	1473	3,139	.002	University Highest	
Complex problem solution	1.63	1.31	1.21	1.8	1.47	1.37	1461	3,862	.000	University Highest	
Ethical decision making	1.45	1.04	0.98	1.27	1.37	1.07	1458	4,440	.000	University Highest	
Quantitative skills	1.28	1.16	1.41	1.11	1.44	0.95	1485	1,807	NS	Not a High	
N*	545	194	78	138	43	87					

\* Sample sizes reflect the bases from the elimination of incomplete surveys

As shown in Table 3, Marketing majors reported significantly greater value added by their major than other declared majors for 7 of the 13 general education outcomes. The outcomes with the largest differences were teamwork skills, ethical decision making, learning to become a productive member of society, and problem recognition. Other significant differences were reported on respect for diversity, an orientation to community service, and the ability to see order in complex situations.

TABLE 3  
COMPARISON OF OUTCOMES ENHANCEMENT (VALUE ADDED) BY MAJOR

Outcome	Marketing Majors	Other Declared Majors	F	Sig
N	142-147	757-781		
Respect for diversity	1.80	1.49	3.481	.031
Productive member of society	1.63	1.23	6.486	.002
Community service	1.32	1.07	3.334	.036
Global systems	1.50	1.34	1.543	NS
Competence in specific major	2.31	2.11	2.092	NS
Communication skills	1.78	1.59	1.552	NS
Commitment to life long learning	1.63	1.42	2.032	NS
Team work	1.81	1.30	9.773	.000
Problem recognition	1.79	1.50	5.028	.007
Conceptualization of order in complex situations	1.72	1.46	3.776	.023
Complex problem solution	1.73	1.50	2.614	NS
Ethical decision making	1.69	1.23	8.644	.000
Quantitative skills	1.28	1.25	2.751	NS

The relative importance of the outcomes was also evaluated by the graduating students. The comparison of relative importance by degree program is shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4  
RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF OUTCOMES TO FUTURE SUCCESS AND ENHANCED QUALITY OF LIFE  
BY DEGREE PROGRAM (1 = MOST IMPORTANT, 13 = LEAST IMPORTANT)

Outcome	Undergraduate			Graduate			N	F	Sig
	BSBA	BA	BS	MBA	MA	MSIS			
Respect for diversity	11	9	12	11	4	12	1520	8.006	.000
Productive member of society	6	7	10	8	8	9	1517	5.013	.000
Community service	10	10	11	10	11	10	1516	3.479	.000
Global systems	13	12	13	13	13	13	1508	7.362	.016
Competence in specific major	8	4	2	8	7	1	1512	6.121	.000
Communication skills	1	1	1	1	1	2	1514	2.203	.026
Commitment to life long learning	7	3	5	7	5	9	1514	3.800	.000
Team work	2	8	3	2	3	4	1544	3.007	.002
Problem recognition	4	8	7	3	2	8	1514	3.402	.001
Conceptualization of order in complex situations	9	11	9	8	10	8	1511	3.144	.002
Complex problem solution	5	5	4	5	9	3	1512	2.581	.008
Ethical decision making	3	2	6	4	6	7	1509	6.101	.000
Quantitative skills	12	13	8	12	12	11	1503	5.200	.000

There were significant differences in the rank orderings across degree programs for all of the learning outcomes. All students agreed that communication skills were very important and that understanding the interaction of global systems was relatively unimportant. Competence in the specific major was ranked higher by those in Information Technology programs (BS, MSIS), but less so for others. Those pursuing technical degrees also ranked complex problem solving higher than the other groups. For the BSBA group, of which Marketing majors are a subset, communications skills, teamwork and ethical decision making were judged to be the most important. There was no difference in the importance of rank orders between the Marketing majors subset and the BSBA population.

A correlation analysis was performed between the 13 learning outcomes and the number of Marketing courses taken by each graduating student. As shown in Table 6, ten of the 13 outcomes showed small but significant positive correlations.

TABLE 5  
CORRELATION BETWEEN NUMBER OF MARKETING COURSES TAKEN AND LEARNING OUTCOME (N = 881 TO 875)

Outcome	r	Sig
Respect for diversity	.113	.000
Productive member of society	.113	.000
Community service	.079	.010
Global systems	.026	NS
Competence in specific major	.044	NS
Communication skills	.058	.043
Commitment to life long learning	.087	.025
Team work	.121	.000
Problem recognition	.080	.009
Conceptualization of order in complex situations	.058	.050
Complex problem solution	.061	.037
Ethical decision making	.097	.002
Quantitative skills	.003	NS

The most significant outcomes from the extended exposure to Marketing courses seem to be for the outcomes teamwork, respect for diversity, and learning to become a productive member of society. Those outcomes unaffected are quantitative skills, an appreciation of the interaction of global systems, and competence in the specific major. The lack of correlation between the number of Marketing courses taken and competence in the specific major is an unexpected result. There are at least two possible explanations. First, all declared majors were included in the analysis. It is possible that non-Marketing majors took a large number of Marketing courses, but judged them not directly relevant in achieving competence in their non-Marketing majors. Second, Marketing may be similar to Economics in that all the basic elements of the discipline are presented in the first courses taken, and unlike Mathematics in that mastery of Marketing does not require that courses be taken in a particular building block sequence. The number of Marketing courses taken was also positively correlated with the importance given to recognition of real world problems and opportunities to career success ( $r = .079, .069, n = 889$ ). This may be due to the increased exposure of the advanced student to courses using the case method.

A difficulty in longitudinal outcomes assessment is to determine the degree to which any change in capability can be attributed to the university experience or to other changes over time such as growing older, obtaining experience, becoming more familiar with effective work habits, becoming more widely read, and the like. The students were, therefore, asked to assess the part of his or her personal growth and development that could be attributed to the university experience, compared to other influences. Marketing majors ascribed more of the influence for changed capabilities to the university than other groups ( $\chi^2 = 62.234, df = 22, sig = .000$ ). This could be attributable to the fact that they are younger than the comparison groups, and may be, therefore, more impressionable. Marketing majors averaged 26 years old, non-Marketing majors averaged 29 years ( $t = 9.69, df = 462.27, sig = .000$ ). The student course evaluations were analyzed to determine if Marketing's positive general education outcomes could be attributed to more positive student evaluations of the Marketing faculty. The 4,152 evaluations conducted during the last three years (the survey data collection period) were analyzed and

mean scores on the statement, "I would recommend this instructor to my friends," compared by department. Marketing course instructors were rated higher than the university-wide population ( $F = 13.217$ ,  $df = 4151$ ,  $sig = .000$ ). The positive rating of Marketing faculty could attest to their effectiveness which, in turn, would yield more positive learning outcome evaluations by Marketing students. Marketing courses were also judged to be more useful than other courses by a large percentage of students, however ( $F = 15.893$ ,  $df = 45151$ ,  $sig = .000$ ). This lends credence to the supposition that there is something inherent in the Marketing discipline that is the cause of its very positive general education learning outcomes.

### Conclusion

The efficacy of a major course of instruction such as Marketing can be judged, in large measure, by how well it answers the needs of its students in providing learning outcomes that are valuable to them. These skills and abilities are not uniquely derived from each major course of study, but are provided through a combination of a liberal arts core and specialized courses in the major. The major provides the application of general knowledge derived from the liberal arts foundation and, in so doing, makes the general education knowledge active and relevant. Marketing seems to do a particularly good job of reinforcing the liberal arts experience perhaps because of the eclectic and humanistic nature of the discipline.

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