STRATEGIC ISSUES IN MARKETING EDUCATION: THE RESIDENT VERSUS COMMUTER SCHOOL DICHTOMY

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ABSTRACT

The educational environment at commuter campuses differs dramatically from that of resident campuses. Since most marketing educators learned their teaching and research skills at predominately residential campuses, the move to a commuter school might be an unpleasant and frustrating experience. To be successful, the educator must learn to adapt to the differences in the academic environment in much the same way marketers adapt to changes in their marketing environment. In essence, a marketing approach is needed. It should be noted that the authors do not believe that educators at commuter schools should ever consider lowering their expectations regarding student performance. Instead, modifications that increase the quality of the educational experience and that enhance one's research and service record should be considered.

The differences in the academic environments between commuter and resident campuses can be divided into three areas: university/campus, community, and student differences.

Three major university/campus differences need to be considered. They include differences in University missions, entrance requirements, and faculty differences. Generally, commuter schools tend to have locally oriented missions, goals, and entrance requirements. The facilities at commuter schools tend to spend less time on campus and include a larger percentage of adjunct instructors.

Community differences that might have an impact on one's approach to marketing education, research, and service at a particular campus include the size of the community and the relationship between the University and the community. The size of the community tends to be a resource constraint for the commuter school. Also, commuter schools tend to be more dependent on the local community than are resident campuses. As a result the relationship between the commuter school and the local community is usually much closer.

Differences between commuter and residential students that impact marketing educators include backgrounds, outside obligations, effort necessary to get to campus, career situation, social needs, length of time necessary to complete a degree program, and community ties.

These differences in the academic environments between residential and commuter schools lead to a number of potential problems and opportunities. Some examples of potential problems at commuter schools include the University being fiscally tied to the local economy, myopic missions and objectives, less collegiality, a lack of common interests and goals among the faculty and students, students are on campus less often, students have greater time constraints and more potential distractions.

On the other hand, commuter schools offer a number of potential opportunities that might not be available at residential campuses. They include easy access to the community, community service options, maturity of students, students desire for useful job skills, and students with work experience. Marketing educators need to develop adaptation strategies that minimize the problems and maximize the opportunities associated with commuter campuses.

This article suggests that each campus is different and therefore marketing educators must learn to analyze and adapt to differences in these academic environments. However, a few generalizations for potential areas of adaptation for marketing educators teaching at commuter campuses can be made. They include course/classroom modifications and outside the classroom activities. Within the classroom activities include reviewing the basics as a lead in to the advanced courses, more class discussions, more direction on projects and other outside of class assignments, experience related projects, smaller group sizes on projects, self selected groups with peer evaluations for projects, and planning class activities that can be performed off campus.

Some outside of class activities include socializing with the adjuncts, focusing student organizations on professional and networking activities, and getting involved with the local business community.

This article suggests that marketing educators need to analyze the academic environment at their respective universities to be able to make the necessary modifications to become more effective teachers and researchers. This is especially important when educators change from resident to commuter universities or vice versa. Also, the framework proposed here can be used to help in the evaluation of prospective job opportunities.