

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF STUDENT LEARNING ASSESSMENT IN MARKETING PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

Effective student learning assessment contributes to marketing department internal strategic planning and fulfills AACSB accreditation requirements. The purpose of this research is to provide a brief review of the development of student learning assessment and report findings of an exploratory study on current learning assessment measures and practices in marketing programs at AACSB accredited schools. Results indicate that the most frequently used direct measures of student learning were written and oral assignments and the most often implemented changes include multi-section course coordination, introduction of new courses, and modifications to existing courses. Staff support, faculty stipends, and training were reported as important incentives to encourage voluntary faculty participation.

ABSTRACT

Assessment programs in marketing education emphasize meeting requirements from several stakeholders (Nicholson, Barnett, and Dascher 2005). Active engagement in an assessment program may assist marketing educators in determining whether purported knowledge that is taught and skills that are developed in the marketing curriculum represent the desired outcomes that marketing majors receive from their course of study. Effective assessment programs contribute to internal strategic planning of marketing departments (Nicholson, Barnett, and Dascher 2005), facilitate marketing program reviews, and also partly satisfy standards of accrediting agencies such as AACSB International. Despite a growing body of literature addressing assessment programs in business and marketing education (Sampson and Betters-Reed 2008; Tong, Choi, and Kelley 2009) and heightening interests in marketing program level assessment activities, little is known about the current status and common measures and practices marketing departments are using in building their assessment programs. A closer review of the literature suggests that this is partly because many assessment studies are based on only one aspect of the curriculum (e.g., Dudley and Marlow 2005) or a single assessment tool (e.g., Aurand and Wakefield 2006), and a program-wide investigation of assessment practices is largely lacking.

The primary purpose of this research is to address this research gap by first providing a brief review of assessment programs and second reporting results of an exploratory study on common assessment measures and practices

across the marketing curricula. Specifically this study attempts to address the question "What marketing departments are doing for their student learning assessment programs?" Results of this exploratory study provide insights into the activities and practices commonly implemented in marketing department assessment programs of AACSB accredited schools.

BACKGROUND

The drive for accountability in higher education has been building over the past four decades (Black and Duhon 2003). Early attempts in the 1970s by state governments and university governing boards to inject accountability into higher education took the form of audits of budgets and program reviews (Folger 1977). These early efforts to assess what graduates had learned did not focus on assessing student performance but rather on the structure of the curriculum and resources allocated to a program of study.

In the 1980s, program reviews that demonstrated learning outcomes were designed to address the concerns of critics of higher education and the requirements of accrediting agencies. A series of studies pointing to the deterioration of education, such as the *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (National Commission on Excellent in Education 1983), led the U.S. Department of Education in 1988 to require federally approved accrediting bodies to include assessment as part of postsecondary accreditation standards (Apostolou 1999). In addition, several state public university systems, such as Georgia, Tennessee, and California, required their

institutions to prepare assessment plans for major degree programs that measure student performance rather than the allocation of resources (Herring and Izard 1992; Stivers, Campbell, and Hermansen 2000).

Standards that measure learning outcomes have been historically included and still are required by accrediting agencies of professional schools, such as those in engineering and medicine (Volkwein, Lattuca, Harper, and Domingo 2006). The leading accrediting organization of business schools, AACSB International, replaced its resource-based standards with standards emphasizing “continuous improvement” in 1992 and an outcome-based assessment requirement in 2002. In 2005, an assurance of learning (AoL) standard was included into the AACSB accrediting standards which required schools to define outcome goals and methods for demonstrating accountability for student learning (Shaftel and Shaftel 2007).

Assessing student learning at the marketing department level is both necessary and important (Black and Duhon 2003; LaFleur, Babin, and Lopez 2009). First and foremost, individual areas such as marketing departments are often charged with assessing specific learning objectives and implementing relevant portions of the school’s assessment program (Daigle, Hays, and Huges 2007). Results from marketing department assessment facilitate better continuous improvements as well as providing valuable insights and direct reference for marketing program reviews. In addition, a “one size fits all” school assessment is limited in its ability to capture the differences in learning styles and teaching pedagogies in different academic majors (e.g., Karns 2005, 2006; Marshall 2007; Wheeler 2008), and a department level assessment serves to address targeted continuous improvement within the context of individual academic majors such as marketing. For example, a recommendation to add a math course may be appropriate for some business majors but probably less relevant for finance and accounting majors and school-wide assessment programs often fail to acknowledge and address such difference in continuous improvement plans. As such, the assessment of learning and program review must also take place at the departmental level to achieve meaningful continuous improvement (e.g., Dudley and Marlow 2005).

In particular, Barnett, Dascher, and Nicholson (2004) suggested that marketing departments need an assessment program for the marketing curriculum because giving the authority for making curriculum content decisions to a school committee may lead to ambiguous accountability problems when departmental faculty must interpret and implement the committee’s decisions. There are some studies that have addressed the measurement of learning outcomes and implementation of assessment programs within the marketing department (e.g., Aurand and Wakefield 2006; Crittenden and Crittenden 2006; Dudley and

Marlow 2005; Nicholson, Barnett, and Dascher 2005; Sampson and Betters-Reed 2008). For instance, Crittenden and Crittenden (2006) analyzed 122 syllabi of a capstone marketing course from colleges across United States, finding the course goes by extensive listing of course names with a variety of textbooks and reading materials. Davis, Misra, and Van Auken (2002) suggested gap analysis as an effective way to incorporate continuous improvement in the marketing curriculum while Sampson and Betters-Reed (2008) presented a conceptual model of AoL assessment with a case study of marketing curriculum review and AoL implementation. Empirically Nicholson, Barnett, and Dascher (2005) reported results from a survey of marketing area coordinators regarding assessment outcome measures, and Aurand and Wakefield (2006) experimented on using student peer evaluations and critiques in a marketing plan project as an assessment tool to address a key AACSB standard in the marketing curriculum. Also, group-based assessment (GBA) and oral examination (Viva Voce) were proposed as effective assessment methods to achieve learning goals (Bicen and Laverie 2009; Pearce and Lee 2009).

While the importance of a successful assessment program is well documented in the literature, the task of designing such assessment programs remains challenging (Nicholson, Barnett, and Dascher 2005). A review of the assessment literature reveals several key success factors including appropriate levels of funding and resource allocation to assessment programs (e.g., Martell 2007), overall effectiveness of direct and indirect assessment measures (e.g., Buckman 2007; Shaftel and Shaftel 2007; Nicholson, Barnett, and Dascher 2005), implementing improvements in curriculum and courses to “close the loop” (Martell 2007; Peach, Mukherjee, and Hornyak 2007), and gaining faculty commitment (e.g., Peach, Mukherjee, and Hornyak 2007) among others.

Despite a dramatic increase in resources devoted to meeting the AoL standard of AACSB in a short period of time (Martell 2007), the literature suggests that most of the resources have gone to external training (e.g., sending faculty to AoL workshops) (Martell 2007). In terms of assessment measures, previous research has noted both direct measures such as course assignments and tests (Bacon 2003) and indirect measures such as survey of potential employers (Nicholson, Barnett, and Dascher 2005) but rarely multiple measures (Nicholson, Barnett, and Dascher 2005). Further, development of measures and collection of assessment data are worthy and meaningful only if the assessment program “closes the loop” by revising courses and curriculum and implementing changes to improve student learning (Martell 2007; Peach, Mukherjee, and Hornyak 2007). Equally important in the literature is overcoming the challenge of faculty resistance to assessment (Pringles and Michel 2007). Successful implementation of an assessment program requires active

participation and commitment of faculty (Peach, Mukherjee, and Hornyak 2007), and effective administrative incentives may alleviate such resistance.

Drawing on literature and building on recent studies and the rationale for marketing departments to develop assessment programs, this study investigated five questions: (1) what level of support is allocated by marketing departments to assess student learning? (2) who is assigned the primary responsibility for assessing student learning? (3) what direct and indirect assessment measures are used by marketing departments to assess student learning? (4) what improvements have resulted from direct and indirect assessment measures to the marketing curriculum? and, (5) what is the level of faculty participation and relevant incentives in implementing the assessment program at the department level?

METHOD

A survey study was conducted using a web-based questionnaire. Exploratory in nature, this study was designed to examine common assessment measures and practices at marketing programs in AACSB accredited schools. Responses are analyzed to reveal patterns, raise questions, and gain a preliminary understanding of the issue so that more rigorous investigations can proceed in the future. Marketing department chairs were determined to be the key informants as this study was particularly interested in Marketing program review and assessment.

Survey Development

To address the five research questions, a questionnaire was developed focusing on the following issues: resources allocated to assessment of learning, assessment methods (direct and indirect measures), improvements using assessment results ("closing the loop"), and faculty involvement. A number of established measures from assessment literature (e.g., Martell 2007; Pringle and Michel 2007) were used to be consistent with previous studies, and a few new measures were added to address questions particular to this study.

To determine the resource allocation to assessment programs, respondents were asked to indicate the amount budgeted for assessment (in dollars) as well as specific allocation of financial resources to various assessment activities (e.g., Martell 2007). Similarly, to address the accountability issue (e.g., Pringle and Michel 2007), respondents were asked to check all primary personnel responsible for the assessment program from a list consisting of deans, associate deans, department chairs, designated committee, and faculty members among others.

Questions investigating assessment methods were included regarding using direct and indirect measures of student learning. Based on AACSB (2007) definitions, direct measures entail demonstration of students' knowl-

edge or skills acquired in their course of learning (e.g., written assignments graded with a rubric) (Martell 2007). Indirect measures, on the other hand, typically use tools such as surveys, focus group interviews, and senior exit interviews to ask students, alumni, recruiters, and employers respectively about how well students achieved the learning goals of the program and how well they perform in jobs related to their majors.

"Closing the loop" addresses how assessment results are used to improve the current curriculum (Pringle and Michel 2007). Ten measurement items were adopted and modified from extant literature (e.g., Martell 2007; Pringle and Michel 2007) to measure curriculum improvements as a result of assessment. In addition, faculty participation was measured with regard to faculty activities (e.g., setting goals), participation incentives (e.g., stipend and release time), and faculty resistance (Martell 2007; Pringle and Michel 2007). Particularly for faculty resistance, which is believed to be a common obstacle in implementing assessment programs (Martell 2007), respondents were asked to indicate both the intensity and specific causes for such resistance. Respondents also were invited to share additional comments regarding faculty resistance to assessment.

Sample and Data Collection

A list of marketing department chairs in business schools in the United States was developed using Marketing Faculty Directory 2005–2006 (Hasselback 2007). The list consisted of names, titles, and email addresses of marketing department chairs as well as corresponding institutions. Data collection commenced in April 2008 with an introductory email message containing an embedded link directing the respondents to a web-based questionnaire. A unique identification number for each respondent was included for tracking purposes. A web-based survey service (www.qualtrics.com) was used to host the questionnaire and data collection. The questionnaire was administered following the conventional mail survey procedures (Dillman 1978) including a reminder email to all non-respondents two weeks after the initial mailing. Data collection resulted in a sample of 42 useable responses.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the level of financial support that the department provided to implement assessment program. Six departments reported no financial support for department assessment activities. Of the departments that allocated resources to conduct assessment, 54.6 percent budgeted less than \$1,000 annually and 16 percent allocated a budget of \$1,000 – \$2,500. Somewhat surprisingly, 9.7 percent of the departments allocated more than \$15,000 annually to their assessment programs.

TABLE 1
FINANCIAL SUPPORT ALLOCATED ANNUALLY TO
CONDUCT STUDENT LEARNING

Financial Support	%
Less than \$1,000	54.8
\$1,000–\$2,500	16.1
\$2,501–\$5,000	6.5
\$5,001–\$7,500	6.5
\$7,501–\$10,000	3.2
\$10,000–\$15,000	3.2
More than \$15,000	9.7

Slightly more than 46 percent of the departments provided resources to administer standardized instruments. Almost 40 percent of the departments provided financial support for faculty training, 32.1 percent provided books and materials on assessment, 25 percent allocated resources to the development of questionnaires and 42.9 percent provided other types of support. Expanding the depth of the analysis by looking at only the departments that provided a certain type of support provides more insight into how assessment budgets are allocated. Faculty training represented 43 percent of the budget allocated to assessment by the departments that provided faculty training. Those departments that allocated resources to books and materials represented 23.6 percent of their assessment budget. The largest portion of the allocated budget was spent on standardized instruments (48.5% of the budget of those departments that used standardized instruments). Departments that invested in the development of questionnaires spent 42.8 percent of their budget on this activity. Of the departments that provided other kinds of support, five departments provided other support in the form of faculty assigned time while administrative time, staff support, summer grants, and evaluators were provided by one department respectively.

Over a quarter (25.6%) of the respondents indicated that the dean or an associate dean was primarily responsible for assessing student learning. The departments that retained responsibility for assessing student learning gave the authority to the department chair (15.4%), department committee (20.5%), or a faculty member that either received release time (17.9%) or did not receive release time (20.5%).

Table 2 indicates the direct measures of assessment used by the responding departments. All of the respondent department chairs indicated that at least one direct assessment measure was a part of their assessment program. Written assignments graded with a rubric were used by 76.4 percent of the departments. Oral assignments graded with a rubric (61.7%), course embedded assignments with a rubric (55.8%), MFT (41.2%), common school exami-

nations (41.2%) cases evaluated with a rubric (38.2%) and systematic evaluation of teamwork (35.8%) were also frequently used direct measures.

Table 3 indicates the changes that have been implemented as a result of the direct assessment measures. New admission standards (55.8%), major modifications to required core marketing courses (50%) and to teaching styles (44.1%), minor modifications to required core marketing courses (38.2%), and modifications to teaching methods (32.4%) were the most frequent improvements. The respondents were asked to share any comments regarding specific improvements that were implemented. One chair noted that their treatment of global and international aspects of marketing was found to be weak and improvements were addressed in the content of the core classes. Another chair stated that the professors in the department were taking the responsibility for assessment seriously resulting in meaningful changes.

All of the respondent department chairs indicated that at least one indirect measure was used to supplement the direct measure(s). The results are shown in Table 4. The most frequently used indirect measures were surveys of graduating students (67.6%), surveys of alumni (61.7%), surveys of employers (50%), and evaluations by supervisors of student interns (41.1%).

Table 5 summarizes the implemented improvements in the curriculum as a result of the indirect measure assessment. Improvements most often took the form of new or modified courses (51.8%), major modifications to require core or curriculum (44.1%), and modifications to student learning objectives (35.3%). Other improvements included minor modifications to required core curriculum (17.6%) and modifications to teaching methods or styles (14.7%)

Sixty percent of the departments required faculty involvement in the assessment process. Over 85 percent of the departments involved their faculty in defining learning goals for the marketing degree. Faculty were also heavily involved in developing assessment measures (76.4%), and “closing the loop” by finding solutions

(76.5%) and implementing (76.5%) ways to improve student learning. We also asked an open-ended question regarding the process departments use to transform assessment results into improvement in student learning. One of the department chairs described the transformation process as “we collate them, course coordinators summarize them, send them to assessment committee, which makes recommendations to our Program Review Committee, which makes recommendations to the full faculty, which votes on them.” Most departments also developed action plans based on assessment results or at least had multiple faculty meetings to share assessment data and suggest continuous improvement changes.

The department chairs were asked to evaluate the resistance of their faculty on a scale of 1 (no resistance) to 7 (very significant resistance) in assessing student learning. The mean response of 2.58 indicated slight resistance to performing the tasks involved in assessing the marketing program. This result is not surprising as faculty members understand the assessment of student learning is crucial in the accreditation or re-accreditation of their programs. Yet, this does not necessarily translate into faculty's willingness in participating in assessment process especially if they cannot be compensated for time and effort spent on it. Indeed, further analysis yielded a confirming result.

In the follow-up question, the department chairs were asked an open-ended question about the major concerns faculty had about assessment. The amount of time that assessment takes (67.6%), the lack of knowledge of how to implement the assessment program (35.2%), and a fear that assessment results will be used in performance evaluations (29.4%) were the most frequently encountered concerns. In particular, this demonstrates that the amount of time that faculty should spend for the assessment process could be developed into the most serious reasons of faculty resistance or at least a key factor which reduces faculty commitment to the assessment process.

When asked how faculty resistance was reduced, the department chairs stated they emphasized the benefit of performing student assessment, provided release time, and aggregated results so individual faculty member could not be identified in assessment outcomes. Except a few departments which offered training and/or stipend to faculty to reduce resistance, it appeared that the most department chairs relied on verbal persuasion (i.e., emphasis of the reaccreditation process and to student learning) to reduce faculty resistance. Lastly, respondents were also asked about the incentives offered to faculty to gain their involvement in the assessment process. Table 6 summarizes the results. The use of support staff (38.2%), faculty stipends (29.4%), and training (26.8%) were the most frequently reported ways to secure faculty participation in the assessment process. In contrast some departments did not provide any additional incentives to faculty.

As found in the open-ended question, some of the marketing chairs considered faculty's participation to assessment programs a duty or a part of the faculty's job. However they also admit that it would be difficult to see substantial improvement of student learning by only resorting to “faculty' duty.” Instead, it would be encouraging for faculty if for example, at least one or two faculty members are able to attend AACSB assessment conferences, learn how the assessment process can be improved, and potentially apply it to their own schools to enhance student learning.

DISCUSSION AND LIMITATIONS

Effective assessment of student learning and marketing program reviews are pivotal to continuous improvements and therefore quality of marketing education. Various stakeholders are demanding that educators be held accountable for the outcomes of their educational programs. The current study reviewed the development of student learning assessment and investigated the use of assessment programs by marketing departments at AACSB accredited business schools. Although some of the assessment literature cites many reasons for academic departments to have their own assessment programs to evaluate their academic majors, based on responses from key informants, it appears that relatively few marketing departments have their own assessment programs.

The current research addresses five important assessment issues in marketing education. First, regarding resource allocation to assessment programs, results support previous assessment research (e.g., Martell 2007) in that resources allocated to the assessment of student learning are also very limited at the department level. Consistent with previous research, findings suggest that most of the resources allocated to assessment were used to train faculty (Martell 2007) and implement standardized tests of student knowledge.

Secondly, results supported our proposition that while deans and associate deans often take primary responsibility for assessment, the marketing departments retained some responsibility for assessing student learning. This lends support to our contention that communication of goals and continuous improvements must occur at the marketing department level. Reportedly, marketing department chairs, department committees, or a designated faculty member was given authority for assessment at the marketing department level. While previous research has focused on accountability issues at the program level (e.g., Pringle and Michel 2007), findings from this study reveals the responsible personnel at individual departments. This is particularly relevant to department chairs in creating designated task force for assessment of specific learning objectives at marketing major level. As for the use of direct and indirect measures to assess student

TABLE 2
DIRECT ASSESSMENT MEASURES THAT SCHOOLS USE TO HAVE STUDENTS
DEMONSTRATE THEIR BUSINESS KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS (TOTAL
SUMS TO MORE THAN 100%)

Direct Assessment Measures	%
Written assignments graded with rubric	76.4
Oral assignments graded with rubric	61.7
Course embedded assignment with rubric	55.8
Major Field Test (MFT)	41.2
Common school exams	41.2
Cases evaluated with rubric	38.2
Systematic evaluation of teamwork	35.3
Simulations	20.5
Individually written business plan	8.8
Assessment center	5.3
Mock interview	2.9
Other	8.8

TABLE 3
IMPROVEMENTS IN STUDENT LEARNING THAT HAVE RESULTED
FROM THE DIRECT ASSESSMENT MEASURES OF STUDENT
LEARNING (TOTAL SUMS TO MORE THAN 100%)

Improvements in Student Learning	%
Closer coordination of multi-section courses	55.8
Major modifications to required core curriculum	50.0
Modifications to teaching styles	44.1
Minor modifications to required core curriculum	38.2
Modifications to teaching methods	32.4
New or modified courses	14.7
New admission standards	11.7
Greater use of out-of-the classroom learning experience (e.g., internships)	8.8
Modifications to student learning objectives	5.3
Modifications to grading methods	2.9
Other	5.8

learning, all of the respondents indicated that the department used both direct and indirect measures in the effort to assess student learning.

In line with extant literature (e.g., Bacon 2003; Martell 2007) written assignments, oral presentations and assignments embedded in courses were the most frequently used direct measures. Given the fact that the nature of the course content in marketing lends itself to cases, team projects and presentations (e.g., Aurand and Wakefield 2006), it was not surprising that these measures would be heavily used at the marketing program level as they were

at the business program level. Similarly, the most frequently used indirect measures were consistent with previous research (e.g., Nicholson, Barnett, and Dascher 2005). Particularly, marketing majors learn about survey methods and would be more receptive to completing a survey prior to or after graduation as an indirect measure of student learning.

Generally consistent with the literature (Martell 2007; Peach, Mukherjee, and Hornyak 2007), efforts to “close the loop” resulted in changes, either major or minor to the core marketing courses. The indirect measures most fre-

TABLE 4
INDIRECT ASSESSMENT MEASURES THAT SCHOOLS USE TO HAVE
STUDENTS DEMONSTRATE THEIR KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS
(TOTAL SUMS TO MORE THAN 100%)

Indirect Assessment Measures	%
Survey of graduating students	67.6
Survey alumni	61.7
Survey employers of alumni	50.0
Evaluation by supervisors of student interns	41.1
Survey job placement of graduating students	38.6
Evaluate students' performance in licensing exams	20.5
Conduct exit interviews with graduating students	17.6
Conduct focus groups with graduating students	8.8
Conduct focus groups with recruiters	8.8
Other	

TABLE 5
IMPROVEMENTS IN STUDENT LEARNING THAT HAVE RESULTED FROM
THE INDIRECT ASSESSMENT MEASURES OF STUDENT LEARNING
(TOTAL SUMS TO MORE THAN 100%)

Improvements in Student Learning	%
New or modified courses	51.8
Major modifications to core curriculum	44.1
Modifications to student learning objectives	35.3
Minor modifications to required core curriculum	17.6
Modifications to teaching methods or styles	14.7
Closer coordination of multi-section courses	11.7
Greater use of out-of-the classroom learning experience (e.g., internships)	2.9
Modifications to grading methods	2.9
New admission standards	2.9
Other	14.7

TABLE 6
INCENTIVES USED TO GAIN FACULTY INVOLVEMENT IN THE ASSESSMENT
PROCESS (TOTAL SUMS TO MORE THAN 100%)

Incentives	%
Staff support for assessment process	38.2
Faculty stipends	29.4
Training	26.8
Release from teaching	5.8
Other	26.8
	11.7

quently resulted in a change to the core marketing class or the learning objectives of various courses, which seem to be natural choices since modifying courses and course content is within direct control of marketing faculty in most universities.

Moreover, the results indicated that departments relied heavily on faculty to oversee the assessment programs. This finding confirms that it is imperative that faculty are committed to the effort to assess student learning (Pringle and Michel 2007) within the marketing major or the effort will unlikely be successful. The majority of departments required their faculty to participate in the assessment program. Interestingly, while mandatory participation requirement often induces resistance (Pringle and Michel 2007), respondents in this study encountered only slight faculty resistance. This may indicate that faculty members do not resist to the assessment of student learning as they understand that the assessment process is crucial in the accreditation or re-accreditation of their department and colleges. But this may not imply that most of faculty would be dedicated to participate in the assessment process because of its importance. In particular, in the majority of the cases, this resistance took issue with the amount of time that assessment requires, which is the inconvenience factor addressed in Pringle and Michel (2007). Simply stated, without proper compensation or support for the assessment, full commitments from faculty would be hardly expected.

Pringle and Michel (2007) suggests that fear is more strongly related to faculty resistance, while findings from this study suggest that only a small number of respondents reported fear of using assessment results for performance evaluations was a cause to faculty resistance. This raises an interesting question as to why fear seems to be absent in this case. It is possible that the respondents of our survey (marketing department chairs) were not well aware of level of fear faculty members may have regarding the assessment process. If it is not to be called fear, at least, faculty members may have some concerns related to the assessment process. Indeed, LaFleur et al. (2009) showed faculty members were concerned about possibilities of losing control in classroom by being forced to cover certain material and to administer a standardized final test.

Since fear has been well documented to be a strong cause of faculty resistance to assessment, research on possible practices that may alleviate fear or concerns regarding the assessment process would be very relevant and useful.

The respondents also indicated that they provided several resources as incentives for faculty to participate in assessment in order to mitigate the concern for inconvenience. Additional research is needed to investigate the effectiveness of these practices on alleviate faculty resistance. Given the importance of faculty involvement for the success of an assessment program, this variation in results merit future research that investigates specific

causes to faculty resistance such as fear and more importantly how to encourage faculty members to actively engage in assessment programs.

Lastly, the results of the current study must be interpreted in light of its limitations. The web-based survey format may have methodological limitations and potential non-response bias, especially with the prevalence of SPAM even on an academic network (Kaplowitz, Hadlock, and Levine 2004). While this limitation is acknowledged, given the exploratory nature of this study, these findings nonetheless provide meaningful insights and valid answers to the five proposed research questions.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

We believe that findings of this study offer relevant and useful information for marketing departments that are interested in developing an assessment program for the marketing major. The results of this study provide insights into highly praised assessment practices and activities in marketing departments based on a broad survey across curricula. Findings may help marketing educators better understand successful assessment programs in peer schools.

While exploratory in nature, this study is the first research that attempts to provide empirical insights as to what marketing departments are doing in building assessment programs. As such, it opens the door to a number of assessment program design issues to be explored and questions to be answered. As this research offers preliminary yet interesting findings, more theoretical and empirical issues are to be addressed in future research. For instance, future research may explore alternative survey methods and achieve a larger sample of respondents to replicate and test the boundary of the study's results and conclusions.

Future research is also needed to provide further clarification on specific means and measures of assessment, required activities for faculty involvement and participation, as well as best practices in program review and assessment, among others. It is also important that future research explores other important factors that may be at play and investigate relationships among the key factors. Furthermore, future research may address the difficulties of collecting assessment data at the department level and explore how assessment results are disseminated among marketing faculty members to achieve effective curriculum improvement among others.

In summary, the current study makes an important contribution to marketing education research. Interesting research questions may germinate from this study, which opens a door to future research and to a better understanding of successful assessment program design, and all together achieve continuous improvement and assure quality in marketing education.

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