

Advertising to Marketing Majors (Before They Become Marketing Majors)

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Abstract

College students are often confused and overwhelmed when declaring their major. Concerns range from the stability of the resulting careers, to lifestyle and income potential. Marketing happens to be a major with countless avenues to pursue following graduation, making it difficult for students to answer important questions at an early stage. College and department advisors, along with faculty, try to give the best information possible, but expertise in the vast array of career paths may be limited to one or two people with whom a student may have contact during the first years of college.

Students are increasingly concerned about their post-college careers even before stepping foot on a college campus (Burnsed, 2011). Additionally, research suggests that college students choose a major based upon the influence of parents and peers (Gebhard, 2015). Our findings support this statistic, yet the millennial generation makes up approximately 40% of the unemployed in the U.S. Perhaps it is time for students to take the reins when choosing a college major.

Another trend in higher education is the increasing competition between colleges and universities. College enrollment is expected to be at an all-time high from 2018-2014, and with nearly 20% of all bachelor's degrees granted from U.S. institutions in 2014 conferred to business disciplines (NCES, 2016), this is a great opportunity for departmental leaders to communicate with young people about a marketing major before entering college.

This is a call to action for universities, but marketing departments in business schools, specifically, since more than one-half of administrators were "very concerned" about meeting the year's enrollment goals in 2016 (Hanover, 2015). Communicating with and engaging students at an early stage (i.e., before college decisions are made), in a manner that resonates with the young student, not only educates the student about the major, but it also establishes a relationship that other universities may not offer.

The current research reveals the top concerns of students in choosing a major, and we make recommendations for communicating with and engaging young students while still in high school or earlier.

Our study included 1,076 undergraduate students in all grades from a large university in the southeast. Of those surveyed, 88% had chosen a major, but only 5% had declared marketing as their major. One hundred twenty six students were undecided at the time of the survey.

From the study, three main factors emerged surrounding a student's choice of major: Job Factors, University/School Factors, and Personal Factors. This research discusses the prevalent influences in each of those factors for students who chose marketing for a major. We then make recommendations for use the Job Factors, University/School Factors, and Personal Factors in communicating with students about choosing to major in marketing. Finally, our findings leave us with several areas for future research, which will be discussed.

Job Factors

Students were asked which variables were most important: income, industry, prestige, advancement, work schedule, shift times, vacation, benefits, status of the job market, stability of the career, work setting, travel, relocation, and ease of entry. On a likert scale ranging from 1 (Not Important), to 5 (Extremely Important), men and women marketing majors reported that stability of the career was the most important factor ($\mu_{\text{men}} = 4.12$, $\mu_{\text{women}} = 4.27$).

University/School Factors

Next we asked a series of questions dealing with elements of the university or school the students chose to attend. These elements were generic in nature, including: school where the degree is housed, courses in the degree program, promotion of the major, availability of courses, professors, online course, face-to-face courses, internships, co-ops, major is safe and reliable, major is exciting, campus location, easy requirements, enjoy the courses, website, major. Again, both men and women who chose marketing as their major indicated that the most important factor was that the major was exciting ($\mu_{\text{men}} = 3.87$, $\mu_{\text{women}} = 4.01$). The next most important factor was the professors ($\mu_{\text{men}} = 3.74$, $\mu_{\text{women}} = 3.91$).

Recommendation: Showcase the professors in the messaging to the students. By giving background information about the professors, including the job experience prior to becoming a professor, students will learn more about the job opportunities and career paths in marketing. Additionally, the students will see the importance of being flexible throughout one's career, but that marketing is a safe and reliable major leading to many career opportunities.

Personal Factors

Finally, we asked a series of questions that would help us understand the personal influences in students' decisions to choose marketing as their major. The influences included: having a talent in the area of the major, family, friends, business acquaintance, parent's occupations, household income, extra-curricular activities, and sports. Again, men and women chose the same factor as "extremely important." This factor is having a talent in the particular area of the major ($\mu_{\text{men}} = 3.79$, $\mu_{\text{women}} = 3.91$).

References

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Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers, and Practitioners: This research reveals themes that are important to young students when choosing a major in college. To remain competitive and relevant among peer universities, departments of marketing can utilize expertise, along with recommendations herein, to capture students' attention at an early stage to inform and influence more marketing majors.

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